

MS. ORTIZ: My name is Karen Ortiz. I moved to the Northwest Valley in Delta County, Colorado, in 1982. I am on the Board of Directors of the Western Slope Conservation Center, Paonia, Colorado, and a semi-retired teacher. The current coal leasing guidelines were passed when I was a teenager. In 1985, I was laid off my teaching job, due to a coal slowdown. That was a pretty major hit to our Valley. I believe it's imperative that the Federal Government updates the coal leasing system to address the impacts that coalmining activities have on local communities and mitigate the challenges our communities face in [indiscernible] cycles of mining. This includes requiring the highest degree of reclamation standards, [indiscernible] bonding for future reclamation activity, conducting a thorough analysis of all impacts to air, water, and wildlife, prior to issuing new leases and ensuring a fair return from coal leasing. Nearly 40 years ago, a group of North Fork residents organized to strongly encourage the local coal mines to minimize their impacts along the North Fork of the Gunnison River. That group would become my organization -- the Western Slope Conservation Center. We proved to be highly effective collaborators with the mine. Alex Johnson spoke earlier to many of our accomplishments. I want to address [indiscernible] proud of. The coal methane recapture demonstration project. It repurposes methane gas and unseen toxic air pollutants into electricity for Epson [phonetic] Ski Corporation. The project is at the now closed Oxbow Elk Creek Mine in Somerset. It was a collaborative effort of both public and private entities. You've heard about our very clean burning coal. North Fork communities have benefited from this wealth over many decades without sacrificing the other riches that our local land, water, and air provide. That, coupled with methane off-gassing from our closed and currently operating mines in our recapture project, puts us into an excellent position for the Federal Government to leverage our values of methane recapture methods [indiscernible] research and training site. It could create training and jobs for some displaced miners while diversifying our local economy and energy generation through methane recapture and other renewable sources at our disposal. The North Fork also possesses a wealth of renewable energy sources, like micro-hydro, solar, and biomass. We would welcome an opportunity to pilot some innovative ways to leverage those sources of energy from our -- for our homes,

farms, businesses, governments, and community centers. This could similarly diversify our economy, create new jobs, and realize the mass potential for renewable energy. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in my home region. Thank you so much for being here and listening.